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THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-first year

Letter dated 26 September 1996 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer your attention to General Assembly/Security Council document A/51/400-S/1996/779.

The restoration of the Western Wall tunnel was undertaken as part of an ongoing effort by Israel both to reveal major archaeological finds in Jerusalem and to improve the tourism infrastructure in the Old City. The tunnel, in fact, has been opened to tourists and pilgrims for years. The opening of the new, additional entrance was initiated only to improve access to the tunnel and provide visitors with greater comfort and safety.

The tunnel itself, which dates from ancient times, runs the length of the Western Wall, one of Judaism's holiest sites, and allows pedestrians to enter one of the oldest subterranean paths in Jerusalem from the Western Wall plaza and exit onto the Via Dolorosa. Despite Palestinian charges to the contrary, at no point does the tunnel run beneath the Temple Mount.

The above-mentioned document attempts to link the Western Wall tunnel in a direct way to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Such a characterization is both deceitful and misleading. The tunnel neither traverses nor affects the Al-Aqsa Mosque or its foundations.

The re-excavation of the tunnel was conducted under the supervision of archaeologists and engineers for the purpose of providing greater access to the sites holy to so many people, Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. The opening of the tunnel neither damaged any archaeological or religious sites, nor endangered the security or the integrity of such structures in the Old City, Islamic or otherwise. Israel has always striven to respect and preserve the sites in Jerusalem which are holy to so many. To this end, Israel remains committed to maintaining freedom of worship for all religions in Jerusalem.

The Palestinian attempt to distort and manipulate the facts surrounding the Western Wall tunnel is a blatant effort to create a crisis in order to pressure Israel. The Palestinian Authority, instead of attempting to cool passions and use its authority and ability in a responsible manner, has only served to incite and inflame the Palestinian people. This is a cynical misuse of its obligations and responsibilities.

During the last two days, 12 Israelis have been killed and 54 more injured by the armed Palestinian security forces. It is indeed both ironic and tragic that Israelis have been killed by the very weapons which Israel provided to the Palestinian Authority, also as agreed upon in the Interim Agreement.

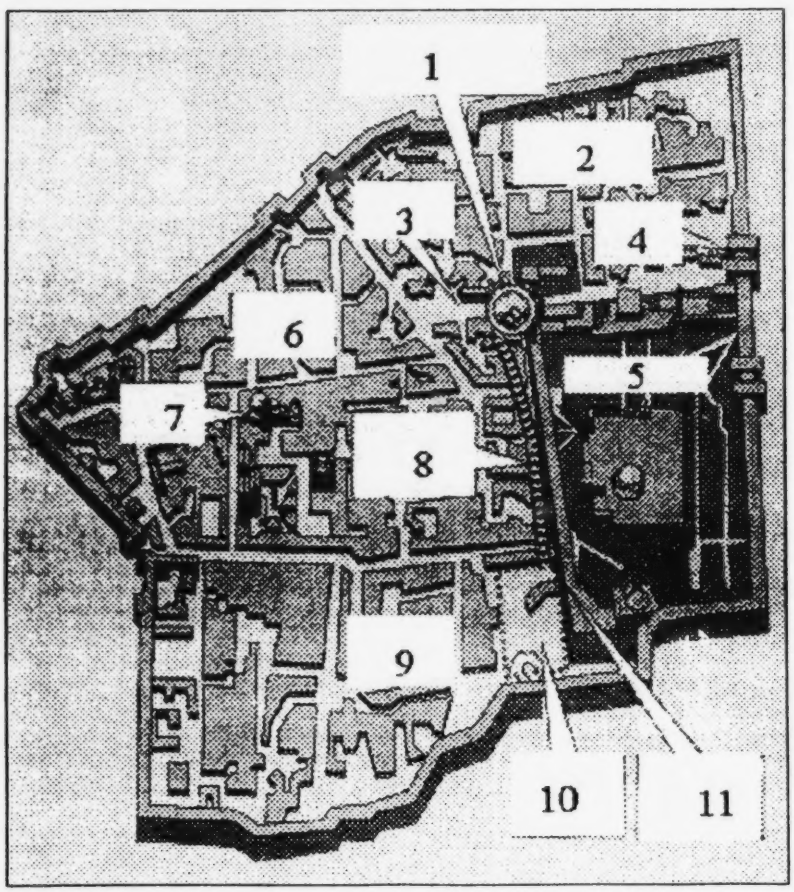
In light of the violent and apparently orchestrated events of the last several days, Israel and the Palestinian Authority should "foster mutual understanding and tolerance", as provided by the Interim Agreement.

Attached please find an accurate map of the area in question.

I would be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 33, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) David PELEG
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Western Wall Tunnel - Diagram



Legend:

1. New entrance to tunnel
2. Moslem Quarter
3. Via Dolorosa
4. Lions' Gate
5. Temple Mount
6. Christian Quarter
7. Church of the Holy Sepulchre
8. Path of the tunnel
9. Jewish Quarter
10. Western Wall Plaza
11. Western Wall